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Peter Elzinga, Alberta Minister of Agriculture

4-H BEEF CLUBS SET NEW RECORD

Not long ago, some remarkable numbers were brought to my attention, the type which make you sit up and take notice.

Here's what I heard. The subject was 4-H beef club sales. The number of young people involved was well over 3,000. The number of head sold was 3,165. The gross from these sales was \$3,979,605 — about as close as you could get to the \$4 million level.

Well, a little division told me the average total price per head was \$1,257. Indeed, most of the final bid prices were in the teens, \$1.10 to \$1.20 per pound, with a few higher and a few lower.

Why do I mention the numbers? Because they represent a part of agriculture and rural Alberta we seldom hear much about: how thousands of young rural Albertans spend their free time, how the private sector will provide sponsorship for worthwhile activities, how most young people never get into serious trouble but instead spend their time productively, and how there are thousands of adults who are prepared to donate their time to help young people progress.

The figures I mentioned above represent but one example of the hard work put in by all those who participated in 4-H last year. In this case, I have some figures on beef sales, and so I can mention those. But the other clubs also have annual events, sales and public displays, and I believe all who participated in those events should be commended for their dedication and effort.

As far each 4-H beef sale is concerned, it represents something far more than a beef calf exchanging hands. It represents many hours of work for a youngster who has groomed and fed the animal, during both bright sunny days and

bitterly cold winter mornings. It represents much patience and dedication, trying to teach a beef animal to follow a lead around the auction ring. Finally, it represents a taste of the business of real life — arranging for a calf, and feed, and, if necessary, veterinary care — and knowing you have to sell the animal if you're not going to lose money.

Beyond dollars, there is a human element to this story. After spending eight or nine months with a calf, young people become attached to the animals; they become pets. But there eventually comes a time to part with that pet, and that moment can be rough. I guess we all realize this is not one of the easier parts of growing up.

There are many other points to be made, but I think one is especially important. If you recall the numbers I mentioned above, you'll note the average price paid for these animals is very, very high, easily 20 or 25 percent over the going market.

In its own way, this is how the private sector has traditionally shown its support for this aspect of 4-H. It is a generous gesture on the part of all the large companies, local businesses, individuals, neighbours, in fact, anyone who is involved in buying a 4-H calf.

I'm extremely pleased to note that the private sector, from the local grocery store all the way up to national corporations, is very generous in ensuring these young people have their costs taken care of, and have a little prize money to spend besides. Even here, there is an important lesson for young people — that hard work and dedication does pay off.

This is what 4-H is all about: learning through participating. It's something 4-H promotes very well.

I wish to note that beginning August 24th 4-H started its annual media blitz. This involves enlisting any and all media to promote the new 4-H year. Although there are a number of ways this is done, I would simply like to encourage all media to get involved.

As well, I would encourage parents and young people to get involved in 4-H. Year after year, 4-H has shown that it works, that

it gets young people (and older folks too) involved in different activities, and that young people and adults both benefit from the experience. 4-H can always use more members and more leaders.

For further information about any 4-H activity, the people to contact are regional 4-H specialists or local district home economists. They'll have all the details you might require.

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